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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 002724

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E.O. 12958: DECL: TEN YEARS

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: MFA'S COOLER HEADS ON COLOMBIA, PERU

Classified By: PolChief Erik Hall for reason 1.4 (b&d)

1. (C) Summary: Vice Foreign Minister Diego Ribadeneira told the Charge on November 30 that FM Francisco Carrion would like to pay an official visit to Washington in January or February. Ribadeneira, who took office in October when Carrion replaced outgoing FM Antonio Parra, highlighted the importance of good bilateral relations with the U.S. to combat unhelpful "ultra-nationalist" pressures which characterized the previous minister. Those pressures convert foreign policy issues into "political footballs," citing the fumigation issue with Colombia as an example. The Peruvian government's recent actions on the maritime border is another example of an issue which, if not carefully handled, will stir up a nationalist reaction here. End Summary.

Washington Visit

2. (SBU) The Charge and PolChief paid a courtesy call on Ribadeneira November 30 to open dialogue. Ribadeneira was eager to offer himself as a channel for communication on important bilateral issues, saying FM Carrion had encouraged him to do so. Carrion wished to visit Washington in January or February, in recognition of the importance of the U.S. to Ecuador. The details of a visit could be easily worked out between us, he said, but added that it would be important to assure that Carrion had some opportunity to meet with the Secretary, if only briefly. Ribadeneira contrasted Carrion's

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policy of dialogue with Ecuador's partners and neighbors with the former minister's ultra-nationalist line, especially with Colombia, which he faulted for its ineffectiveness.

Colombia

3. (C) Ribadeneira said his talks with Colombian VFM Reyes had been productive, and he would continue them in Bogota on December 2 to help prepare for the bilateral meeting between FMs on December 7. The GOE wishes better relations with Colombia across the board, based fundamentally on the principle of GOE "solidarity" with the GOC in its internal challenges. Ribadeneira was quick to clarify that solidarity implies moral support, not material or military involvement in its neighbor's internal affairs. The GOE also seeks GOC recognition of (and funding support for) the spillover effects of its conflict in Ecuador, specifically the Colombians displaced into Ecuador.

4. (C) Ribadeneira cited fumigation as an example of an issue "ultra-nationalists" have converted into a political symbol, making resolution more difficult. He also said that he had no doubts that those who benefit from narco-trafficking also actively exploit the issue. The Charge expressed concern about the tone of a diplomatic note received by Embassy Bogota from the Ecuadorian Embassy there on the fumigation issue, and clarified some of its mistaken assertions. Ribadeneira said he was unaware of the note, but urged the USG to "consider it a dead issue, not requiring response." The note probably reflected political intervention in response to nationalist pressures, he said. More important than diplomatic protests about the safety of glyphosate, according to Ribadeneira, was progress in bilateral understanding on the issue. VFM Reyes' announced temporary suspension of fumigation within 10 km of the border had been very welcome in Quito, he said. The GOE privately recognizes the GOC's full prerogative to pursue its counter-narcotic fumigation policy. What they seek, he explained, is greater sensitivity to the very real political problems that the border spraying presents for Ecuador. They do not seek suspension of spraying across the entire border region. A satisfactory outcome would be agreement to suspend spraying specifically in zones adjacent to Ecuadorian villages, he said. For its part, the GOE is proposing to revive the bi-national commission and promote contacts between the two nations' military and civilian authorities on a variety of issues.

Peru

5. (C) Another issue which, mishandled, could become a nationalist cause here is the Peru-Chile maritime boundary. The GOP is asking for Ecuador's support in its dispute with

Chile, a request Ribadeneira called "ridiculous." He termed the Peruvian parliament's attempt to delineate baselines for its claim as "utopian, since the Chileans will never give in on this issue." The GOP has also protested Ecuador's recent statement in support of Chile's position, and is seeking to link a pending electricity cooperation agreement to the maritime border issue - which Ribadeneira termed little more than blackmail. The meeting was interrupted by a call from FM Carrion on this issue--Ribadeneira recommended not responding to the Peruvian attempt at linkage, despite Ecuador's serious electricity shortage. Their goal is to keep this from becoming a highly politicized and public issue.

Comment

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16. (C) We support the FM's request to be received in Washington by the Secretary, if it can be arranged. A visit would offer Ecuador's new FM a credibility boost, rewarding his more moderate approach and shielding him from nationalist attack. Ribadeneira's openness offers an opportunity to circumvent the more unhelpful MFA mid-ranks on important issues. His participation in talks with Colombia and Peru is also encouraging, and is clearly already bearing fruit with the former. We are especially encouraged that the GOE seems to have backed off its aggressive stance on fumigation, and is focusing its energies on advancing a broader dialogue with its neighbor to the north.

Biographic Info

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17. (SBU) Diego Ribadeneira Espinosa, 55, is a career diplomat who most recently served as Ambassador to Brazil from 1999-2005. He has also served abroad in Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Chile. He served as MFA Secretary General (VFM-equivalent) in the 1990's during the negotiation of a peace treaty with Peru, and is appreciative of the very positive role played by the USG in that process. Ribadeneira was born in Quito. He studied law and political science at Quito's Catholic University. He is married and has five children.

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